

## Sunday School

### PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY. (FAREWELLS.)

Acts 20:17-35.

September 5, 1909.

**GOLDEN TEXT.**—"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."—Phil. 4:13.

#### DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Acts 20:2-12.

Th.—Col. 1:21-29.

T.—Acts 20:13-24.

F.—Col. 2:1-9.

W.—Acts 20:25-38.

S.—2 John.

S.—2 Tim. 4:1-8.

#### TOPICAL OUTLINE.

Paul summons the elders of Ephesus, vs. 17.

Paul's ministerial and pastoral work, vs. 18-27.

Paul's parting exhortation and commendation, vss. 28-35.

#### SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 71. What is required in the seventh commandment?

A. The seventh commandment requireth the preservation of our own and our neighbor's chastity, in heart, speech and behavior.

#### LESSON COMMENTS.

**Introductory.**—Paul was about to complete his third and last missionary journey. The important city of Ephesus was the center of his operations for three years. Acts 20:31. Ephesus was a strategic point; but the apostle's method was not one of concentration, but of expansion, dissemination. Gospel influences radiated throughout Asia. Acts 19:10. After the stirring events recorded in the first twenty verses of the nineteenth chapter had happened, Paul departed for Macedonia and Achaia, having Jerusalem as his objective point, though he desired also to go to Rome. Just before he left Ephesus, however, Demetrius and others created a great disturbance in the city, which was quelled by the authorities. Paul remained in Greece three months, where his life was in danger from the Jews. He afterwards sailed from Philippi and, touching at Troas, Assos, Mitylene, Samos and Trogylium, arrived at Miletus, on the western coast of Asia Minor, thirty miles from Ephesus. These points may be easily traced on any good map.

**Comment.**—The church at Ephesus was a Presbyterian church, and Paul sent for the elders, who were the divinely constituted representatives of the church, to confer with them about the interests of the Kingdom of Jesus for the last time. He was on his way to Jerusalem, and he lays upon them the solemn responsibility of remembering his teaching and example and of maintaining purity of doctrine, government and worship in the church. The faith, example and character of the teaching and ruling elders in our churches will largely determine the creed and life of the membership in them.

The apostle appeals to the elders as eye-witnesses to testify in regard to the kind of service he had rendered the church as pastor and preacher. From the very beginning he had been uniformly faithful and humble under all circumstances, and he had not, through fear, or indifference, or cowardice, neglected them in times of trial. On the other hand, he had, in public and private, insisted on everything that would be profitable to them, testifying to Jew and Greek the necessity of true repentance and faith: sorrow for sin because God's law had been broken, and faith in Christ as their only Saviour from the guilt, defilement, dominion, presence, being and consequences of sin. He was well aware of the tribulations that awaited him in every city, though he might not be acquainted with them in detail; but they did not deflect him from his course or change his purpose to joyfully complete his ministry to which Jesus had unmistakably called him. To him life was not as precious as fidelity to his Master and loyalty to the truth. The undeserved favor of God was the good news he heralded in his preaching and pastoral work, as well as in the Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians and Galatians, which he probably wrote during his last missionary journey. He told them that they would not see him again, but that he was free from the responsibility of souls, since he had fully declared God's will to them. He felt under

a divine necessity to proceed in the face of every difficulty and danger. He was "bound in the spirit." "The Holy Ghost is here expressly mentioned as the source of what he knew upon the subject, and therefore probably as the concealer or withholders of that which he did not know, or, in other words, as the Spirit by whom, according to the figurative language of the verse preceding, he was bound or kept in ignorance." (Alexander.)

He concludes his remarkable address to them by exhorting them to take heed both to themselves and to the flock. The church was God's and had been redeemed by the blood of God's Son. The Holy Spirit had called them to the sacred office, and it behooved them to guard the interests of the church from enemies inside and outside its folds. For three years he had faithfully warned "every one" with tears. He then commended them to God and His Word that were able to establish them in faith and piety, assuring them that he did not desire their money or clothing, but that he had done manual labor to supply the needs of himself and those with him. He insisted upon their working that they might be able to assist those in need, reminding them of the teaching of Jesus that "It is more blessed to give than to receive." To Paul we are indebted for a knowledge of this great truth, which is just opposite to the teaching of the heathen and of the carnal heart. "Silly the giver, lucky the receiver," is the feeling of the unconverted in and outside the church.

**Doctrinal and Practical.**—1. The principles of Presbyterian church government are taught in the Scriptures, and it is interesting to study the progress of representative government at the present day, both in the civil and religious spheres. One of the greatest needs of the times is the judicious exercise of the episcopal authority in our churches and Presbyteries. There should be a revival of interest in the study of the Form of Government in our Sunday schools.

2. It is very important that the elders in a church be men of high Christian character. They should be spiritually-minded men. The sacred trusts of the office should never be committed to carnal, covetous, worldly persons. More bishops are needed who will study the real good of the people rather than their will, and who have at heart "the peace, purity and prosperity" of the Church. It is the privilege of the elders, as well as their duty, to minister to God's people, and one of the best signs of the times is the interest our laymen are taking in missions, in Sunday schools and in supplying weak and vacant churches. Demas, Diotrophes and Alexander the coppersmith should never be elected elders nor deacons.

3. Paul was an ideal preacher and pastor. He taught publicly and from house to house. He really believed the truths he preached, and had translated them into his own experience. He was soundly regenerated and did not use his office for gain, or popularity, or place, or ease. He proclaimed a full gospel and did not withhold unpleasant things from the people if they were profitable. He preached to all, both Jews and Greeks, and did not confine his ministrations to any one class. He created disturbance wherever he went. Christianity always disturbs the security of the carnal heart, the peace of those who adopt unrighteous methods for gain and the satisfaction of those who have embraced a false religion. His preaching was constructive and permanent. Should we not, as ministers and ruling elders, be more faithful to Pauline methods in teaching and pastoral work?

4. Ministers should be paid for their work. 1 Corinthians 9:14. They are not objects of charity, but deserve what they receive. True ministers are not hirelings. Paul waived his right to pecuniary reward sometimes for his labors and worked with his own hands. But he taught the divine principle that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

5. Paul loved the people to whom he ministered. He devoted all his energies to their welfare. Interest in the individual, the Sunday school class, the church, is a necessary qualification for successful work.

E. P. Davis.

With the close of day, how sweet is rest,  
Beneath God's care, how safe, how blest,  
Then when the morn renews the day,  
Refreshed with sleep, to rise and pray.